

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN MICHAEL K. POWELL**

Today's Order will help improve the ability of low-income consumers to make and receive basic telephone calls from their homes. If estimates prove correct, the expanded eligibility criteria we adopt today should make telephone service more affordable for approximately 1.17 to 1.29 million Americans – roughly 234,000 of whom will have never had basic telephone service before in their lives.

Since its inception, our Lifeline/Link-Up programs have made basic telephone service affordable to millions of low-income consumers. These support measures – though often extremely modest on an individual level – have improved people's lives by making everything from jobs, to healthcare to emergency services available to program participants. And while overall telephone penetration in the United States remains extremely high, too many people, particularly on tribal lands and in rural areas, forgo this essential connection.

By expanding federal default eligibility criteria and encouraging greater community outreach, today's Order improves the administration of the program. While this is an important step, we must remain vigilant to ensure that our statutory goals are met and that states utilize appropriate certification and verification requirements. In the future, the Commission must remain watchful for abuses of the self-certification rule and require underlying documentation where such abuse is demonstrated.

This item could not have been possible but for the diligence and insight of the federal and state members of the Joint Board. I am confident that we will soon see the fruits of your efforts in the form of greater access to basic telephone service across America.